

Message Text

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71

ACTION EA-14

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R 051018 Z APR 73

FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2110

INFO AMEMBASSY MANILA

SECDEF WASHDC

JCS

CINCPAC

USSAG

COMUSMACTHAI

CONCPACAF

13 AF

7/13 AF

S E C R E T BANGKOK 5413

E. O. 11652: GDS-1981

TAGS: MARR TH

SUBJECT: WEAPONS RANGE - THAILAND

REF: A. STATE 046062

B. BANGKOK 2526

1. WE HAVE CAREFULLY REVIEWED REQUIREMENTS FOR TACTICAL WEAPONS' RANGES IN THAILAND IN LIGHT REF A AND BEARING IN MIND NEED FOR MAINTAINING MINIMUM PROFICIENCY STANDARDS FOR USAF UNITS. AS WASHINGTON IS AWARE, THAI POLITICAL CLIMATE NO LONGER AS PERMISSIVE TOWARD VARIOUS MANIFESTATIONS OF US PRESENCE AS IN THE PAST. I HAVE GAVE MISGIVINGS THAT WEAPONS TRAINING IS THE TYPE OF ACTIVITY THAT MAY ENCOUNTER PUBLIC RESISTANCE AND THAT COULD, PARTICULARLY IN THE EVENT OF ANY KIND OF ACCIDENT, SERIOUSLY AGGRAVATE OUR PROBLEMS HERE.

2. MY RESERVATIONS (REF B) ARE COMPOUNDED BY PROPOSAL REF A PARA 5 TO DISCUSS WITH RTG DEVELOPMENT OF SCORABLE RANGES. THIS INVOLVES MUCH MORE IN TERMS OF CONSTRUCTION, ACCESS TO AREA, CONTINUING
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MAINTENANCE, PERSONNEL ON GROUND, SECURITY, ETC., THAN TACTICAL RANGES ORIGINALLY CONTEMPLATED. OUR EXPERIENCE DURING ABORTIVE NEGOTIATIONS 1968-70 TO ACQUIRE A SCORABLE RANGE WOULD INDICATE CONSIDERABLE THAI STICKINESS ON THESE POINTS.

3. MOREOVER, THAIS MAY WELL QUESTION WHY WE ARE PROPOSING TO ESTABLISH COSTLY SCORABLE RANGE FACILITIES IN THAILAND TO ACCOMMODATE A TEMPORARY FORCE NEED. TO APPROACH RTG WITH FORMAL REQUEST FOR A PROJECT OF THIS MAGNITUDE COULD BE MISINTERPRETED AS A SIGN OF U. S. INTENTION TO RETAIN CURRENT LARGE USAF PRESENCE HERE INDEFINITELY AND WOULD IN ANY EVENT TAKE CONSIDERABLE TIME TO BRING TO FRUITION. FURTHERMORE, SCORABLE RANGE ISSUE MAY IMPACT ON NEGOTIATIONS WE HAVE BEEN CARRYING ON THESE PAST WEEKS TO RETAIN SUFFICIENT AIR SPACE FOR TRAINING AND TACTICAL OPERATIONS AS WELL AS ATTEMPTING TO OBTAIN THAI AGREEMENT TO FLY PRACTICE LOW LEVEL MISSIONS OVER THAILAND TO KEEP F-111 CAPABILITY EXERCISED.

4. ALSO CONCERNED LEST CONSIDERABLE EXPENDITURE ASSOCIATED WITH SCORABLE RANGE MAY STIMULATE US DOMESTIC CRITICS OF MILITARY ACTIVITIES IN SEA; AS WASHINGTON IS WELL AWARE, ANY TIME CRITICS ZERO IN ON US THAI- BASED OPERATIONS WE HAVE TO CONTEND WITH POLITICAL PROBLEMS HERE WHICH IN TURN COMPOUND MANAGEMENT ASPECTS OF OUR PRESENCE. GIVEN PROBABLY COST OF ESTABLISHING SCORABLE RANGE, MIGHT IT NOT EVEN BE MORE ECONOMICAL FERRY CREWS TO THE U. S. FOR TRAINING? THIS WOULD ALSO TEND TO ALLEVIATE MORALE PROBLEMS I ANTICIPATE DURING PERIOD OF STAND- DOWN.

5. PRIOR RECEIPT REF A, I HAD DISCUSSED WEAPONS RANGE REQUIREMENTS WITH GEN. VOGT (USSAG) AND LTG MOORE 113 AF) AND SUGGESTED THEY FURTHER EVALUATE POSSIBILITY FOR CONDUCTING MAJORITY OF USAF WEAPONS TRAINING OUTSIDE THAILAND, SPECIFICALLY IN THE P. R. I EXPECT THAT 13 TH AF DISCUSSING WITH EMBASSY MANILA FEASIBILITY OF APPROACHING GOP TO ACQUIRE ADDITIONAL RANGES IN THE P. R. MEANWHILE, COMUSMACV IS AUTHORIZED PROCEED WITH LOW KEY STAFF LEVEL DISCUSSION WITH THAI MILITARY AUTHORITIES TO GET A BETTER FEEL FOR LOGISTICS AND PROBABLE COSTS ASSOCIATED WITH ACQUIRING AND CONSTRUCTING JOINT SCORABLE RANGES, BUT I AM MOST RELUCTANT TO PROCEED ANY FURTHER PENDING FULLEST EVALUATION OF ALTERNATIVE POSSIBILITIES. UNGER

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